

Hepatitis A and Your Business

Hepatitis A virus can easily be spread from a food worker to the community. An outbreak of hepatitis A can be very costly and ruin the reputation of a restaurant. According to the CDC, people infected with hepatitis A lose an average of 27 days of work; 11% - 22% are hospitalized; and, for each case, about 11 other people will require immune globulin to keep from getting ill. Following the precautions outlined in this brochure will help you protect your job and your business.

What Is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a virus that can be passed person-to-person through the fecal-oral route when infected people do not wash their hands after using the restroom. If the infected person is also a food worker, the infected hands can then contaminate the food and dishes (even though they look clean) with the virus. Anyone eating the contaminated food or from the dishes could get infected with hepatitis A.

Symptoms

The likelihood of having symptoms is related to your age. The older you are, the more likely you will have symptoms; most children under 6 years old will not show symptoms, even when they have the virus. About 1/3 of Americans have been exposed to hepatitis A. Once you have been infected with the virus, you should be immune to it if you are exposed to it again.

Hepatitis A infection generally causes flu-like symptoms (fever, nausea, abdominal cramps), an enlarged liver, and dark urine. Symptoms may also include jaundice (yellowing of the skin and/or whites of the eyes). Severe liver damage can also occur; an estimated 100 Americans die each year as a result of infection with hepatitis A.

Transmission

An adult may be infected with Hepatitis A for 15 to 50 days before showing any symptoms. The virus can be spread during this asymptomatic period. Unfortunately, a person ill with the virus may not remove all of the virus particles even with proper and regular handwashing.

The possible transfer of hepatitis A, even with proper handwashing, is one reason preventing Bare Hand Contact with Ready-To-Eat food is vital to protecting your customers and your business.

Menu Items

The hepatitis A virus is unaffected by freezing, but is destroyed by high cooking temperatures. Foods associated with outbreaks are generally eaten uncooked or are handled after cooking. These ready-to-eat foods include:

- **Cold items**, such as salads, fruits, deli sandwiches, garnishes, and iced drinks;
- **Foods handled after cooking**, such as hot dogs, hamburgers, or taco salads; and
- **Raw or undercooked shellfish** harvested from contaminated beds.

Check your menu for these ready-to-eat foods and take a close look at how they are prepared and handled.

Handwashing and Its Limitations

Handwashing is generally the first step to remove contaminants that can cause foodborne illness. Unfortunately, even diligent workers can miss spots when handwashing. If the worker is also infected with hepatitis A, the virus can still be on the hands and ready to spread to food or drinks. Fewer than 10 of the microscopic virus particles are enough to make someone ill.

Handwashing is still a vital (and required) part of your food safety system, but it should be combined with your other methods of illness control—excluding noticeably ill food workers and using barriers with ready to eat foods.

Glove and Utensil Use

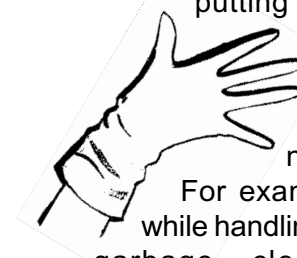
Another way to help prevent hepatitis A transmission is to use a barrier (utensils or gloves) to prevent bare hand contact with foods. Barriers are crucial for food safety when handling ready-to-eat foods (foods that are served cold or will not require further cooking prior to service).

Proper use of utensils (such as scoops, spoons or tongs) should eliminate the need to touch ready-to-eat foods with bare hands.



Be sure all utensil handles are kept out of products. Ice scoops must be stored on a clean surface completely out of the ice.

Gloves used as a barrier during food preparation must also be used properly. Proper glove use includes handwashing before putting gloves on and between every glove change.



Gloves must be changed every time hands would normally require washing.

For example, if you wear gloves while handling raw meat, taking out the garbage, cleaning the restrooms, unpacking boxes, or other activity that might contaminate your hands, you must change the gloves and wash your hands.

Gloves and utensils must be changed often and as they get soiled. Utensils can be washed, rinsed and sanitized. Disposable gloves must be thrown away.

Make it easy for foodworkers to prevent spreading germs:

provide easy-to-use utensils and multiple sizes of gloves for each work station. Also, keep your sanitizer clean and at proper concentration—The hepatitis A virus is destroyed by sanitizers.

Illness Policy

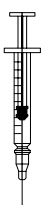
Each establishment must have an illness policy that is understood and followed by all employees and enforced by all managers. This policy should include the following:

- If an employee is ill with fever, diarrhea, or vomiting, he or she must not work.
- Employees that become ill while working must go home immediately.

Maintaining an illness policy will help prevent the spread of many disease-causing organisms.

If you think you have hepatitis A, contact your health care provider and tell your employer. If you believe someone at your establishment has hepatitis A, you must contact the health department immediately. Food workers with active hepatitis A infection are not permitted to work with food.

Immune Globulin



If a food handler is diagnosed with hepatitis A, it is possible that immune globulin shots may be administered to protect customers and close contacts. Immune globulin shots temporarily boost exposed individuals' immune systems to fight off the virus.

The health department will also help decide if immune globulin shots are recommended for the customers based on when they ate at the establishment, the job duties and illness history of the infected employee, and how ready-to-eat foods are handled at the establishment.

Public Notification

If a food worker is diagnosed with hepatitis A, the health department will decide if public notice is required.

Remember: If your establishment has an excellent history of proper handwashing and effective barrier use, this public notice may not have to be made.

Other Precautions

Emergency Situations. Illnesses can spread quickly during emergency situations. If your establishment has a sewage backup, loss of running water, or other emergency, you must close immediately. You must also contact the health department before reopening.

Shellfish. Many outbreaks of hepatitis A have been traced to shellfish harvested from contaminated growing beds. Precautions include:

- **Thoroughly cook all shellfish.** You must inform customers of any raw or undercooked seafood. *This is required by law.*
- **Use shellfish only from approved sources.**
- **Keep shellfish tags.**

Children. Children infected with hepatitis A often show no symptoms of illness, yet can still be contagious. Children must be kept out of the food preparation areas of food service establishments.

Vaccination. There is a vaccine for hepatitis A. Vaccination is a 2-shot series and is available from your doctor or the health department. The vaccine is recommended for people who are at high risk for getting the virus or are at risk for serious illness from infection (primarily people with damaged livers).

For more information contact:



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Related brochures available:

"Facts About Hepatitis A"

"Handwashing"

"The Ill Foodworker"

**For more information on Hepatitis--
Centers for Disease Control**

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/a

Hepatitis A Prevention

public food service series



www.bfhd.wa.gov

